

'Kitchen Knowledge', Desperate Foods, and Ritual Healing in Everyday Survival Strategies during the Great Famine in China,

1958-62

Zhou Xun, University of Essex

Abstract

Famine is a social and economic crisis that is commonly accompanied by widespread of malnutrition, starvation, epidemic disease, and increased mortality. This paper focuses on the period of the Great Leap Famine in China between 1958 ~~to~~ and 1962. Based on newly collected oral interviews and archival evidence, it gives voices to ordinary villagers from different parts of China — from various counties in one of China's biggest and most populated Sichuan province in the southwest, to Shandong in the east and Hunan in central China -and examines their experiences and their survival strategies in times of hunger, illness, and death. It shows that an integral part of everyday famine culture, particularly in rural China, which was worst hit, concerns the kitchen knowledge and practice of healing and nutrition. Many traditional recipes that were used in previous times were rediscovered and used as everyday hunger coping techniques. Some are dated back to the Ming dynasty — a few were recorded in *Materia Medica for Famine Relief* (*Qiuhuang bencao* 救荒本草, c. a. 1406). Using the methodology of oral history set against an historical background of traditional materia medica, this paper elicits how ordinary people in rural China devised complex and plural strategies to cope with fundamental biological crises.

Key Words

Great Leap Forward Famine, Chinese famine foods, survival strategies, cannibalism

Introduction

The Great Leap Forward (1958–61) was Mao's dream for leading China into a Communist Utopia. After the CCP consolidated its power in the early 1950s, it rapidly began enforcing collectivizzation in the countryside. Despite the bloodshed and catastrophic results of Joseph Stalin'sthe collectivization in 1928–32 initiated by Joseph Stalin in the Soviet Union, which led to the devastating Ukraine famine in

Formatted: Line spacing: single

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Bold

Comment [ZX1]: They are fine

Formatted: Right: 0.63 cm

1932–3, Mao wanted a fully socialist agricultural system established throughout China, and he wanted it fast. At provincial and local levels, a number of cadres embraced it with unprecedented enthusiasm. The pace of collectivization in China was astonishing. By 1956, virtually all agricultural households in rural China had been organized into collectives. Although the initial stage of collectivization in 1955–56 in the Chinese countryside did not end up in bloodshed like in the Soviet Union, dissatisfaction and unrest, however, spread amongst the peasant population. Faced with these warning signs, Mao showed no hesitation. He wanted to go further, to launch the “Great Leap Forward.” Two campaigns: the “Anti-Rightist Campaign” and the rural “Socialist Education Campaign” was his tactic to silence any opposition voices within or beyond the Party. A few months later, in the spring of 1958 the full force of the Great Leap Forward was unleashed. It emphasized industrial development at the expense of agriculture, which led to a devastating famine throughout China.

Famine in the Chinese countryside broke out as early as spring 1958, and it was to last another three more years. The top leadership in Beijing was well aware of the problems, but it simply turned a blind eye to them. At the same time, anyone who spoke the truth was purged as a rightist. In August 1958, an enlarged Politburo Conference at Beidaihe passed a ‘Resolution on the Establishment of People’s Communes in the Rural Areas’ to speed up the process of radical collectivization in the countryside. It was accompanied by the rise and spread of radical ‘egalitarianism’, which consisted in ‘levelling of incomes among constituent units of a commune and indiscriminate requisition of manpower and resources.’ A majority of peasants lost their private property as a result. This phenomenon became known as the ‘Wind of Communism.’ By the winter of 1959 – the Year of the Pig, which is usually

regarded as a year of fertility and prosperity – chronic scarcity was felt everywhere in China’s vast land. Very few places were spared from devastation. Entire villages were wiped out; whole families perished; large swathes of countryside fell silent.

While famine may be a natural phenomon, the Great Famine in China was largely a man-made disaster with countless individuals being deliberately starved or beaten to death. It also led to the mass destruction of agriculture, industry, trade, and every aspect of human life, leaving large parts of the Chinese countryside scarred forever by man-made environmental disasters.

As famine esclated, anything edible was consumed, from wild herbs and tree trunks to earth, insects, snakes, rats, decomposing animals, and even human flesh. One of the greatest butchering of wild animals in history took place during this time. Even the giant panda, praised as China’s ‘national treasure’, was not spared.¹ Grazing on raw food growing in the fields was common. While the famine claimed millions of lives, many were killed or became sick as well by eating toxic herbs, plants, or poisonous and indigestible foods. White clay, also known as ‘immortal earth’, could magically relieve the sensation of hunger, but it also caused severe constipation, contributing to yet more deaths.

Having seen that radical collectivization did not work and that the government was failing to deliver adequate famine relief, many villagers turned to the heavens and local gods for help. They developed new strategieis, of such as ritual healing and steam baths. These ‘new’ strategeies were partly relying on the tradtional practices and beliefs dated back to the Ming dynasty. They were generated, reproduced, and given new social meanings.

¹ See Richard Spencer, ‘Eat, shoots and lives’, *Daily Telegraph Magazine*, 18 December 18, 2004, p. 21.

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Line spacing: single

Formatted: No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Endnote Text, Justified, Indent: First line: 0.63 cm

Formatted: Right: 0.63 cm

While collecting oral interviews in rural China for my social history project about the Great Leap Forward famine in Mao's China – the worst famine in history with an estimated of 45 million deaths,² it became clear to me that very few scholars have explored how ordinary people coped with hunger, illness, and bereavement during the radical collectivisation of the 1950s and 19-60s. With the recent exceptions of Frank Dikötter's award-winning book *Mao's Great Famine* (2010) — the first in the English language to use a wealth of archival evidence from across China to capture how and why decisions that led to the famine were taken at the top and how these decisions affected the lives of ordinary people. Also — and Ralph Thaxton's compelling book *Catastrophe and Contention in Rural China* (2008)³ which is — based on some four hundred 400 interviews conducted in Henan. This book, it sheds new light on how powerless villagers formed resistance to the corruption and coercion of collectivization, and on how their hidden and contentious acts, both individual and concerted, allowed them to survive and escape the iron grip of the Communist leadership's authoritarian rule. Apart from these two books, t —, the majority of the existing literature in English focuses mainly on party policies and state initiatives, and offers little insight into life on the ground. Among Chinese language publications,

Formatted: Not Highlight

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Comment [RB2]: Insert 'seemingly powerless'?

Comment [ZX3]: Yes, please do.

² In his 2010 book *Mao's Great Famine*, historian Frank Dikötter uses a whole range of archives to come up with an estimate of at least 45 million premature deaths. See Dikötter, *Mao's Great Famine: the History of China's Most Devastating Catastrophe, 1958-62*, London: Bloomsbury, 2010. A few years prior to the publication of Dikötter's book, Cao Shuji, a Chinese scholar based in Shanghai, pioneered the study of using official local histories published after 1979 by county or city Party committees, and has produced the figure of 32.5 million premature deaths in his widely quoted Chinese-language book *The Great Famine: China's Population in 1959-1961*. See Cao Shuji, *Da jihuang: 1959-1961 nian de Zhongguo renkou* (The Great Famine: China's population in 1959-1961), Hong Kong: Shidai guoji chubanshe youxian gongsi, 2005. Others, such as Judith Banister, the chief of the China branch at the US Census Bureau, put the death figure at 30 million. She based her studies on Chinese government statistic data. — See Banister, *China's Changing Population*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987.

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Line spacing: single

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

³ Ralph Thaxton, *Catastrophe and Contention in Rural China: Mao's Great Leap Forward Famine and the Origins of Righteous Resistance in Da Fo village*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

Formatted: Justified, Indent: First line: 0.63 cm

Formatted: Right: 0.63 cm

special mention should be made of Gao Wangling's work on peasant resistance during the Famine years.⁴ Based on a mixture of oral interviews and local archives, Gao's *Acts of Peasant Resistance in China during the People's Commune* (2006) shows that peasants in various parts of China did not always passively obey government orders. Many of them actively resisted collectivization. To survive the famine, they stole and hoarded food; they suppressed production figures; they learned to slack off work requirements; they secretly kept private plots of land; and so on. Gao's study opened up a whole new way of looking at the famine. Both Gao's and Thaxton's book, however, dealt with only particular villages (or a fictional village in Thaxton's case) in north China.

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

The Archival and Oral History Methodologies

Formatted: Font: (Default) Times New Roman

Formatted: Font: (Default) Times New Roman

Formatted: Font: (Default) Times New Roman

Formatted: Font: (Default) Times New Roman

Formatted: Font: (Default) Times New Roman

Between 2006 and 2010, I travelled across rural China from Sichuan to Henan, Anhui, Shandong, Hebei, Yunnan, Guizhou, Guangdong, and Guangxi. In those four years, I also read as much material in the provincial party archives as I could and interviewed more than 100 famine survivors. These survivors represent a wide spectrum of ages, gender, backgrounds, and social positions: from ordinary peasants to former grass-roots cadres. The interviews I collected show an integral part of everyday famine culture, particularly in rural China where it was worst hit, that concerned the what I term -'kitchen' knowledge' and the practice of healing and nutrition. There exists a vast quantity of data on the maintenance of health and the prevention and treatment of illness that does not relate to professional medicine or state intervention through public healthcare. Understanding the contemporary use of traditional recipes and

Comment [ZX4]: Yes Marta's re-write is better.

Comment [RB5]: Clumsy sentence. Marta: I think my additions help with clarity – Xun correct as you wish or leave – just let me know.

⁴ Gao Wangling, *Renmin gongshe shiqi Zhongguo nongmin 'fanxingwei' diaocha* (Acts of Peasant Resistance in China during the People's Communes), Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2006.

Formatted: Indent: First line: 0.63 cm, Line spacing: single

Formatted: Right: 0.63 cm

techniques against a background of personal stories as well as historical medical texts, such as the *Materia Medica for Famine Relief* (*Qiuhuang bencaos* 救荒本草) can shed light on how ordinary people survived the famine and coped with hunger, illness, and loss on such a large scale. How ~~did~~ ordinary people mediate traditional practices in their everyday life to survive? What were ordinary rural Chinese attitudes towards health, hygiene, illness, and healing during such a time of crisis?

By examining ordinary villagers' everyday experiences and how survivors remember this famine, we can get a better sense of what happened on the ground as well as answers to these questions. In many ways, the tales of survival are more grueling and more painful than those about death. To many survivors of the Great Famine, survival meant to cope daily with little hope that the famine would soon end and the question of how long they could continue to stay alive.

In this paper, I shift the focus from statistics that estimate the dead to accounts that highlight the experiences of the living. The central questions are how individuals and community-mediated traditional practices with or without public health advice. What and how did they eat in order to stave off hunger and to survive?

As an oral and social historian, I try to give voice to ordinary people who lived through the famine. Most of them are illiterate peasants, and none of them have had a public voice in the history of the Great Famine of Maoist China, or in any kind of historical account. The people who speak through these interviews are not household names.⁵ They come from all over China, and present all spectrums of age, background, and social positions: from ordinary peasants to child survivors and medical students. Some are mothers who watched their children dying in the famine but could do nothing, while others grew up as orphans after having lost their parents.

⁵ I have consent from the interviewees for their interviews to be used in this article.

Comment [MH6]: No need to give Chinese twice.

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: No underline

Formatted: Left

Comment [MH7]: Capitalization is appropriate here as the "Great Famine" – earlier when just termed the famine, then should be lower case.

Formatted: Right: 0.63 cm

None of them are heroes or saints, and many of them stole food in order to survive. They have not led remarkable lives, but it is their ordinary life stories, in most cases full of misery and pain, and also their will to survive that I find compelling and worth telling. A history of famine is as much about survival as it is about starvation, destruction, and death. The human will to struggle on under extreme conditions and the ingenuity to cope with crisis are reflections of human strength.

In this paper, I have also included a number of documents from provincial Party archives in Shandong, Hunan, and Sichuan. I give priority to these three provinces because they were among the worst hit by the famine. Not only [sethis](#), these provinces present a measure of geographical and political diversity: all three underwent similar and yet very diverse experiences during the time of the famine. Furthermore, these are the provinces [from](#) where many of the informates [included in this paper came](#). ~~included in this paper are from~~ These reports are compiled by local cadres at the time of the famine. Although they have little to do with the ‘kitchen knowledge’ of ordinary people, juxtaposing to survivors’ accounts, they give readers a fuller sense of what was going on at the time in different places as they not only tell of revivals of ritual healing and cannibalism of dead corpses, they also provide readers with the necessary background information and statistics often missing in the oral interviews.

Surviving: [cCoping with hHunger](#)

Month followed month in 1959, the famine worsened inexorably, exacerbated by intense violence in the communes, endless political campaigns, and, after the Lushan Plenum in August 1959, a redoubled effort at propelling the Great Leap Forward. By

the winter of that year, chronic scarcity was felt in many parts of China. Very few places were spared from devastation. Villages were wiped out and whole families perished. Large swathes of countryside fell silent. To ease the desperate hunger and stay alive, villagers resorted to consuming anything they could find. A number of the interviews and archival documents demonstrate that villagers were consuming food substitutes and adapting traditional recipes and hunger-coping techniques used in previous times. We can find some of the techniques people used or substances people ate ~~were~~ recorded already in the Ming *Materia Medica for Famine Relief* (*Qihuang bencao* 救荒本草, pr. 1406), *Collection of Wild Vegetables* (*Yecao bolu* 野菜博录, ca. 1622), and in other Ming records on famine foods. These include eating wild herbs, tree trunks, and earth. This shows that in rural context, much of the traditional practices since the Ming time were kept alive in every day 'kitchen knowledge'. Ordinary people mediated and continue to mediate traditional practices in food crises in their everyday life

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic

The following accounts were taken from Shandong province in the east and Sichuan province in China's far southwest, two of the most important agricultural provinces in China. Both provinces were among the worst hit by the famine.

Formatted: Indent: First line: 1.27 cm

Furthermore, these two provinces present a measure of geographical and political diversity. They underwent similar and yet very diverse experiences during the time of the famine. Known as China's fruit and vegetable basket, Shandong suffered badly during the famine due to the extreme left policy that Shu Tong, Shandong province's Party Secretary, advocated at the time.

In parts of Shandong, not far from its provincial capital Jinan, famine broke out as early as spring 1958. A government report from one village shows that famine had taken 600 lives in less than six months. Villagers were forced to sell everything

Formatted: Right: 0.63 cm

they had, including their children. They consumed over 50 different types of food substitutes during the time of the famine, including leaves from the scholar tree and castor-oil plant, grass for feeding pigs, young stems from the Tree of Heaven (*Acilanthus*), wheat husks, sorghum flowers, grass seeds, coarse chaff, corn husks, peanut skins, bean leaves, potato sprouts, elm bark, and water melon rinds.⁶

Formatted: Font: Italic

In the far southwest, the situation was equally bleak. Li Jingquan was Sichuan province's Part Secretary at the time. Famous for his harsh personality and radical leadership style who often compared himself to former warlords, Li was an ardent supporter of the Great Leap Forward. Between 1958 and 1962, Sichuan, the reputed 'Land of Abundance', achieved some of the highest death figures in the country: an estimate of 12 million people were wiped out in Sichuan alone.⁷ In parts of Sichuan the death rate reached 50% in 1961. In a report dated 27 January 1961, the government official Yang Wanxuan, who was sent to investigate the famine problem in eastern Sichuan's Shizhu county, wrote the following:

“After spending one week in Shizhu county, I confirm the problem here was very severe and shocking. The number of deaths was enormous. According to the police investigation, the total population in 1958 was more than 346,000. In 1959 and 1960 the death rate reached 63,792. [...] According to several further investigations, in some communes the number of deaths had reached 40%. For instance, in Shuitian commune, the death rate was 40.5%, while in

Formatted: Indent: Left 0 ch

⁶ ‘A report by the Jinan Municipal Investigation Team on the outbreak of famine and deaths in Gaoguanzhai township in Zhangqiu county’, 29 January 1959. From Shandong Provincial Party Committee archive, file A001-02-776, pp. 67–8.

⁷ See Liao Bokang, “Lishi changhe li de yige xuanwo: Sichuan Xiao, Li, Liao shijian huimou” (A Whirlpool in History: Recounting the ‘Xiao, Li, Liao Incident’ in Sichuan), in *Dangdai Sichuan Yaoshi shilu* (Major Historical Events in Sichuan during the Maoist Era), by the Contemporary Oral History Editorial Office, Chengdu: Sichuan Renmin chubanshe, 2005, p. 170.

Formatted: Left, Line spacing: single

Formatted: Right: 0.63 cm

Qiaotou commune the death rate was 39%. The lowest death rate was around 10%. [...] In a number of the most problematic administrative districts, the average death rate was between 50 to 60% . In Dahe commune, for instance, the death rate in the Number 3 administrative district was as high as 66.4% and in Qiaotou commune's Wafang administrative district, the death rate was 58.2%. The most severe case was Xianfeng administrative district in Donghua commune. The Banzhulin collective canteen used to have 9 families, a total of 37 people, but now only 3 families, comprising 7 people, are still alive.

I have heard very shocking things. For instance, in Shuitian commune because the number of deaths had grown very high, the commune simply dug a big hole and threw more than 40 dead bodies into it. The corpses were left there unattended. Two kilometers from the county town in Dengjian commune, over 60 dead bodies were buried by the river embankment. More than 20 were left exposed, attracting a few scavenging dogs that tried to pull the bodies away. No one seemed to care.

There have also been at least five incidents of people eating dead human flesh

and we heard that in Dahe commune there were even incidents of living people

being devoured by others. In Qiaotou commune's Nanmu administrative district

nursery there used to be more than 70 children, but now there are only 20 left.

Formatted: Indent: First line: 1.27 cm, Left 0 ch

Formatted: Indent: First line: 0.16 cm, Left 0 ch

Formatted: Indent: First line: 0 cm, Left 0 ch

Formatted: Indent: First line: 1.11 cm, Left 0 ch

Formatted: Indent: First line: 0 cm, Left 0 ch

Formatted: Indent: First line: 1.11 cm, Left 0 ch

Formatted: Right: 0.63 cm

The dead children were carried out in bamboo baskets, one basket after another.⁸

Formatted: Indent: First line: 0 cm, Left 0 ch

Chef Yan, a cook at a small street restaurant outside of Sichuan's provincial capital Chengdu, is originally from Ziyang county in central Sichuan. In his village, a huge number of people starved to death during the famine as well. He lost his father, and his mother suffered severe oedema as a result of the famine. He and his sisters tried to survive on their own. Even to this day he still has a vivid memory of a whole repertoire of things he and fellow villagers consumed in order to stave off hunger and to survive the famine:-

Formatted: Indent: First line: 1.27 cm

In 1958 I was about 10, and I was still in the school. From the school we had to walk a long way to the collective canteen. The canteen was so far away, and quite often I did not go. Instead my family pickled some radish. At meal time we soaked them in hot water, and drank the water. What else did we eat? We also ate wild celeries and banana stalks. We used to peel the outer part of the stalk, and chew up the heart — just like one would chew up sugar cane. We also ate cakes made of pea stalks. We first milled the stalk into flour. We would then sieve the flour and use them to make cakes. One person could only get one cake. [Laugh]

Formatted: Indent: First line: 0 cm

Formatted: Justified, Indent: First line: 0 cm

At the time, there were seven of us in the family. For all seven of us we only got a small bowl of food from the canteen: one person had only one serving spoonful of food, which consisted of mostly liquid. I was only a young boy then. The food we received was not enough to fill my stomach, so with other children of at my age, we went up to the hill to collect some rape stalks. We took the stalks home, and

Comment [RB8]: 'of'?

Comment [ZX9]: Yes, 'of' would be better

⁸ Report by comrade Yang Wanxuan on the situation in [Sichuan province] Shizhu county and the current work arrangement, 27 January 27, 1961. From Sichuan Provincial Party Committee archive, file JC 1-2606, pp. 63-64.

Formatted: Line spacing: single

Formatted: Right: 0.63 cm

blanched them. Afterwards we would squeeze out the excess water and cook them in a pan. We would cook them until they turned into a thick stew. We ate that to ward off the hunger.

We also ate insects such as crickets. When I caught a cricket, I just put it straight into my mouth. Just like that, I ate it alive. We also ate little worms. The worms live in the earth. After ploughing, they emerged on the surface. We would light a fire and cook them over the fire. Some people also ate toad, but I did not eat it. I was frightened of it. Even now I am still frightened of it.

I did eat snake, however. My father was still alive then. Once he cooked a snake and I ate some. The snake bones were so hard, I could not chew them. I only remember the soup was very white. It was so greasy that even now I could still feel the grease when I touch the things I wore at the time. I could not wash away the greasy feeling. My wife teases me sometimes about this. She says I am suffering now because I was too fond of food and so I ate anything.

I also ate water celery, a wild vegetable that grows on the edge of farming fields. I would eat them either pickled or cooked. The worst thing that we ate were cakes made of 'immortal earth'.⁹ It was some kind of white clay. It came in pure white colour, and people used it to make porcelain. They called it 'immortal earth'.⁹ It had a sandy texture. Since we were so hungry in those days, people would mix the white clay with some water to make pancakes. We used to fill our stomach with that. One old lady was severely constipated after eating it. She had to use her fingers to scoop out the hard stool. We also ate ramie leaves. They were used to make shoes. But during the time of the famine, we chopped them up finely and made pancakes to feed ourselves. [...] That was in 1959, the most difficult time.⁹

⁹ Interview with Chef Yan, Zhongxing chang in Huayang county, Sichuan province, April 1997.

Formatted: Indent: First line: 0.63 cm, Line spacing: single

Formatted: Right: 0.63 cm

Amongst the food stuffs Chef Yan and villagers in his home area ingested, the practice of eating snake and earth, in particular, can be found in previous times. In southern China, the practice of eating snake dates back to at least the ~~14th~~-fourteenth century. The Portuguese Franciscan monk, Friar Odoric, records the practice in Canton in the 1320s: ‘There be monstrous great serpents likewise, which are taken by the inhabitants and eaten. A solemn feast among them with serpents is thought nothing of.’¹⁰ In the ~~sixteenth-16th~~-century *Compendium of Materia Medica* (*Bencao gangmu* 本草纲目), the author Li Shizhen 李時珍 (1518-93) also recommended using snake to treat skin disease. The practice was said to be dated back to the Tang dynasty (618-~~907~~-AD).

Formatted: Indent: First line: 1.27 cm

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Earth eating is also not new. The type of earth commonly consumed in China is bentonite. It has a high calcium content with a sticky consistency and is ideal for making pottery. In Africa, as well as in Medieval Europe, it has been and was common for pregnant women to consume bentonite, or a similar type of clay, due to its high calcium content. While earth-eating or geophagy may be universal, in China it has unique historical, cultural, and religious meanings. The practice is thought to have originated from Daoist traditions, as part of the diet for ‘immortality’,¹¹ thus the type of earth consumed is commonly known as ‘Boddhisattva Guanyin earth’ (*guanyin tu* 观音土) or ‘immortals’ rice’ (*xianmi* 仙米). However, ordinary people discovered it as a means to survive hunger at the time when keeping alive was more of an issue than the pursuit of immortality. Back in the Ming, in his journal on the 1628 famine in Shannxi, the government official Ma Maocai 馬懋才 马懋才 (17th

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Comment [MH10]: can you get Chinese for this and birth-death dates for him?

Formatted: Superscript

¹⁰ Odoric of Pordenone & Paolo Chiesa 2002, ~~The Travels of Friar Odoric: A 14th-Century Journal of the Blessed Odoric of Pordenone~~, Grand Rapids and Cambridge: William B Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2002, p. 122.

Formatted: Right: 0.63 cm

century), a native of Yan'an recorded that local people resorted to earth-eating to overcome their hunger: 'People dug up earth [or stone] in the mountain to eat. The earth is cold and smells damp (腥). One needs to eat very little to feel full, but a few days later their stomachs begin to swell and flop, and death follows soon after'.¹¹

During the time of the Great Leap Famine, villagers in Sichuan, as well as in other parts of the country, rediscovered that earth-eating could combat hunger. In eastern Sichuan, the provincial government investigation team reported that earth-eating had become prevalent in Qu county and had caused a number of health hazards, including constipation. Qu county used to be a major granary for nearby regions, and it produced some of the best-quality pork and tangerines in the province. But the 'Wind of Communism' had swept the region almost bare. For many months in 1961, more than 10,000 local villagers had to endure eating earth to fill their empty stomachs. They dug up more than 400 cubic meters of earth. -Due to the large crowds and limited space, villagers often had to line up under the scorching sun. Some villagers had to travel from far away, so they arrived the night before and slept in the old temple on top of the mountain. Some old ladies even burned incense and paper money during the dig and bowed down to kowtow to the earth [gods].¹²

Earth-eating often led to severe constipation, which in turn sometimes caused death. In one commune in Qu county, more than 240 people were reported to have suffered stomach pain and constipation after eating earth, among them three people who suffered from liver problems, 19 people suffered oedema, and six villagers died

¹¹ Ma Maocai 1984, *Beichen-dajishu* (備陳大饑疏 1628). 《明季北略》卷五, Beijing, Zhonghua Shuju, 1984, p. 42.

¹² Report regarding villagers in parts of Qu county digging 'immortal earth' to eat, due to life's hardship and lack of famine relief, 31 August 1961. From the Sichuan Provincial Party Committee Archive, file JC 1-2620, pp. 177-178.

Comment [ZX11]: No birth-death date, only the date of him passing Imperial examination - 1625

Formatted: Font: 10 pt

Formatted: Font: 10 pt

Formatted: Right: 0.63 cm

as a result. In southern Sichuan's Jingyan county, Luo Guihua, a poor peasant woman in her 70s suffering ill health, remembers how famine eventually took the life of her grandparents as a consequence of eating earth:

“At the time my grandmother was still alive. Her situation was even worse. My mother and grandmother did not get on with each other, plus my grandmother was blind, and my grandfather was a cripple, so I had to endure the starvation myself, and save some food for them. We were given food coupons during that time, and to get food one had to have coupons [...] I tried not to eat up my portion so I could bring some food to my grandparents. Because my mother had a bad temper, I had to do it secretly. [...]

Occasionally, we were given rotten sweet potato from the state granary; we soaked them in the water several times, and then left~~ave~~ them to dry. Once dried, we milled them into flour, and made cakes out of them. Those cakes had no taste. They tasted neither sweet nor bitter. [...]

How could we fill our stomachs? Sometimes we had to resort to eating earth. It was called immortal grain. Many people dug them up from underneath the wall, and pressed them into cakes. We ate anything we could find, and some things we ate were really crude and rough. People often suffered constipation. For instance, after eating the [earth], my grandparents became constipated. Each time they had to use their fingers to scoop out their stool. At the time, we also had no money to buy medicine, and eventually my grandparents died. Just like that, they died of starvation and constipation. There was nothing to eat, nor was

Formatted: Justified

Comment [RB12]: 'left'?

Comment [ZX13]: Yes

Formatted: Right: 0.63 cm

there anything to wear. When my grandparents died, we could not even afford a coffin, we buried their bodies with some straw. Life was that miserable.¹³

During the period of the Great Famine in China, survival often meant enduring extremely cruel, inhumane, and degrading conditions. People did what they had to in order to survive, from stealing and killing to eating human flesh. While cannibalism may be seen as a disturbing, savage, and taboo practice under normal circumstances, for those whose lives were surrounded by raging violence, horror, and death, consuming human flesh did not seem so extraordinary. Terror and starvation stripped people of the very last remnants of their human dignity. To survive such horrendous conditions, they had to resort to any possible means. While local cadres openly stole from state granaries and slaughtered communal calves for personal consumption, ordinary peasants robbed trucks carrying grain and other food items. In the more extreme cases, after only eating wild grass for more than many months, people began to consume human flesh, as corpses became the only available edible material. In the beginning, the government tried to dismiss cases of cannibalism as rumours, but from the end of 1959 as the famine worsened and the level of violence in the countryside reached a frenzy, it was no longer possible to deny that people in many parts of the country had resorted to eating human flesh. The worst cases of cannibalism were found in Gansu and in eastern Sichuan, not far from Chongqing. At one point, some 50 cases of people eating flesh from corpses were reported in Gansu's Linxia municipal, and in Sichuan's Shizhu county, cannibalism had become a widespread practice.¹⁴

¹³ An interview with Lu Guihua, Zhaojue, Liangshan, May 2007.

¹⁴ 'A study on cases of cannibalism in Linxia Municipality', by Linxia branch of Government Solicitude Group, 3 March 1961. From Gansu Provincial Party Committee archive, file 91-4-898, pp. 80-87. 'Regarding humans eating corpses and killing children for consumption',

Formatted: Left, Indent: First line: 1 cm

Formatted: Indent: First line: 0.63 cm, Line spacing: single

Formatted: Left, Indent: First line: 0.63 cm, Line spacing: single

Formatted: Right: 0.63 cm

Situated on the upper reaches of the Yellow River, bordering the Tibetan plateau and Gobi desert in the northwest of China, Linxia was a major historical crossroads between China and Central Asia. The region had always been culturally diverse; the current population comprises 22 different ethnic groups. Although the Hui, or Chinese Muslims, form the predominant group and Islam is the major religion, Chinese and Tibetan Buddhism, and Catholicism have also taken root there. In 1955, the region was chosen as the principal site for some of China's biggest hydropower dams, and two years later, in 1957, it was also designated one of China's first two Hui autonomous regions. As part of the process, local villagers were resettled and persuaded to join farming collectives. The Communist government, as Jing Jun has demonstrated, showed little concern for how or even whether the resettled villagers could cope with the breakup of their communities and lost livelihood.¹⁵ In 1958, these collectives were forcibly merged into the People's Communes and all private properties were confiscated. The construction of the Yanguoxia and Liujiaxia dams commenced in 1958, but villagers were given no prior warning as to what this would entail. Suddenly, one day they were driven from their homes. They watched as their houses were demolished and their villages, farmland, trees, and ancestral tombs, as well as mosques and temples, were obliterated by engineered flooding. A few villagers tried to resist, but the militia badly beat them.

Formatted: Left

a report by comrade Wang Deming from the Provincial Party Committee Investigation Team Shizhu branch, 27 January 1961. From Sichuan Provincial Party Committee archive, file JC1-2608, pp. 89–90. 'The problem of humans eating human flesh', by the Provincial Party Committee Investigation Team Shizhu branch, 9 February 1961. From Sichuan Provincial Party Committee archive, file JC1-2608, pp. 95–97.

¹⁵ Jing Jun 1996, *The Temple of Memories: History, Power, and Morality in a Chinese Village*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996, pp. 71–73.

Formatted: Font: 10 pt

Formatted: Font: 10 pt

Formatted: Indent: First line: 0.63 cm, Line spacing: single

Formatted: Font: 10 pt

Formatted: Endnote Text, Justified, Indent: First line: 0.63 cm

Formatted: Right: 0.63 cm

Meanwhile, a devastating famine broke out in the region, killing nearly half a million people between 1959 and 1960.¹⁶ Everything living or growing was consumed. Villagers even ate lime plaster torn from the walls of buildings in attempts to dull their desperate hunger. After every goose, dog, and cat had been killed and consumed, and the trees had been stripped bare of their bark and leaves,¹⁷ all that was left to eat were the bodies of the famine's victims. Given the choice between dying or eating human flesh, a number of villagers chose the latter. While often the acts of cannibalism were carried out on the corpses of the dead, murder also occurred to provide a source of sustenance.

In the far southwest in Sichuan's Shizhu county, the People's Commune not only robbed villagers of the very last reserves they had, the villagers were also punished if they were caught consuming food substitutes. Anyone found cooking wild fruit or grass was beaten up and had their pots and pans smashed to pieces. In some communes, the death rate reached 25.86% between 1959 and early 1961, the Provincial Party Committee's investigation team discovered 18 villagers in Qiaotou district's Wawu brigade had consumed dead bodies. An old lady named Luo Wenxiu was the first to start consuming human flesh. It took place on 20 December 20 1960. After an entire family of seven had died, Luo dug up the body of the three-year-old girl Ma Fahui. She sliced up the girl's flesh and spiced it with chili peppers before steaming and eating it. According to the investigation team, consuming human flesh to stave off hunger was by no means unique in the area.¹⁸

¹⁶ Linxia Huzu Zizhizhou Zhi (The local history of Linxia Hui Autonomous Region), 1993, pp. 53-55.

¹⁷ 'A summary report from the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party General Office regarding food shortages and riots throughout 16 provinces and autonomous regions, as well as proposed measures to resolve the problem by local Party Committees', 25 April 25, 1958. From Hunan Provincial Party Committee archive, file 141-1-1055, pp. 66-69.

¹⁸ 'The problem of humans eating human flesh', by the Provincial Party Committee Investigation Team Shizhu branch, 9 February 9, 1961. From Sichuan Provincial Party Committee archive, file JC1-2608, pp. 95-97.

Formatted: No underline

Formatted: Indent: First line: 0.63 cm, Line spacing: single

Formatted: Left, Indent: First line: 0.63 cm, Line spacing: single

Formatted: Right: 0.63 cm

Again eating human flesh in times of famine was not a modern phenomenon. As early as in the seventh century, there were records of cannibalism during the time of the famine and war.¹⁹ Ma Maocai's account of the famine in Shaanxi during the late Ming recorded that children and single travellers were often abducted and killed. Their bones were used as fuel for cooking, and their flesh were cooked up and consumed. But a few days later, those who had consumed human flesh became ill: their faces turned red, and their bodies overheated. As result, people died one by one, and the whole area smelled foul.²⁰ Similarly, cases of villagers ~~were~~ poisoned after consuming human bodies also occurred during the Great Famine period. In one village in Shizhu county, for example, according to a government investigating team's report, a number of villagers were poisoned by consuming dead corpses: 'As the corpses were highly toxic, after eating them, 13 people suffered from a swollen body, which also turned a yellow colour, and they all eventually died'.²¹

Illness and ~~d~~Death

During the Great Famine, illness and death as the consequence of eating poisonous food substitutes was common throughout the country. After failing to deliver famine relief, in November 1960 the central government in Beijing launched a nationwide movement of collecting and manufacturing food substitutes and alternative foods. The result was another disaster. Within a month, outbreaks of food poisoning had quickly

¹⁹ Zhang Zhou; *Caoye Jianzai* (朝野僉載), volume 2, Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1997. pp. 1–2, 4.

²⁰ Ma Maocai, 1984, p. 42; *Beichen dajishu* (備陳大饑疏 1628). 《明季北略》卷五, Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1984, p. 42.

²¹ 'The problem of humans eating human flesh', by the Provincial Party Committee Investigation Team Shizhu branch, 9 February 9, 1961. From Sichuan Provincial Party Committee archive, file JC1-2608, p. 95.

Formatted: Indent: First line: 0.63 cm, Line spacing: single

Formatted: Indent: First line: 0.63 cm, Line spacing: single, Tab stops: 0.48 cm, Left

Formatted: Indent: First line: 0.63 cm, Line spacing: single

Formatted: Justified, Indent: First line: 0.63 cm

Formatted: Right: 0.63 cm

spread across the whole of China, alarming the central government. While famine claimed millions of lives, many were killed or became sick by eating poisonous herbs or plants.²² On ~~25~~ December ~~25~~, the State Council in Beijing had to make an emergency announcement warning local governments:-

According to local reports, recently there have been outbreaks of food poisoning caused by eating food substitutes. On December 16, the Bureau of Grain in Fujian province made a telephone report to the Central Bureau of Grain. The report shows that since the end of November, 6,591 people from 43 counties in that province have been suffering from food poisoning and 294 people have died as a result. 2,071 people have been reported suffering from food poisoning after eating cassava and 286 died as a result. A telephone report by the Bureau of Grain in Shaanxi, dated December 15, stated that in Lounan county's Xinjian commune's Xinmin district, 58 people suffered food poisoning after eating flour made of wild hemp flowers. The symptoms include total paralysis as well as nervous disorders.²³

Mama Huang is ~~a 70 plus year old~~ over 70 years old, a peasant woman living in a small village in the western Sichuan plains. She lost both her son and her husband during the famine. She recalls how villagers tried to combat hunger by eating anything they could get hold of. Many of the things they consumed were poisonous and a number of villagers also died as result:-

²² See Zhou Xun, The Great Famine in China: A Documentary History, 1958-1962, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012, pp. 5, 44-58.

²³ 'State Council's emergency announcement to prevent incidents of food poison during the movement of collecting and manufacturing food substitutes', 25 December 1960. From the Sichuan Province Warfare Committee Archive, file JC 202-8, pp. 1-2.

Formatted: Left, Indent: First line: 1 cm

Formatted: Indent: First line: 0.63 cm, Line spacing: single

Formatted: Right: 0.63 cm

“To start with, at each meal each person only got to eat a small piece of sweet potato, the size of a finger. We had to add some cabbage or mustard greens to fill our stomachs. The cabbages were from the field, and they were quite big. We never threw away any outer leaves. We washed them whole in the river, including the outer leaves that had already turned yellow and the tough parts down the bottom. No matter how old and how tough, we cleaned it just as well. Then we chopped it up, cooked it, and ate it to fill our stomachs.

Formatted: Left, Indent: First line: 0 cm

[...]

Formatted: Left, Indent: Left: 0 cm, First line: 1 cm

Some people grazed on raw peas and broad beans. They also stole wheat, and ate it raw. The family opposite us had a child whose stomach swelled up after eating raw peas. He couldn't digest such things as a child. I remember he used to eat raw peas with shells on, while running around with barely any clothes. Sometimes people also roasted wheat and peas. They put peas and wheat inside a stove, roasted them, and ate them like that. They roasted them with shells on. They pushed them into the stove, and then used a shovel to get them out. Then they sieved the peas and wheat to get the ashes out. They ate them like that.

Formatted: Left, Indent: First line: 0 cm

[...]

Formatted: Left, Indent: Left: 0 cm, First line: 1 cm

A number of people collapsed because they ate castor beans. When there was nothing to eat, they ate roasted castor beans: they tasted delicious. But after eating them, people became ill. They fainted and collapsed all over the place, one after another. That was caused by eating castor beans. The beans made people lose balance, so they fell about on the floor. Their vision became blurred: the sky became murky and the earth turned dark. They began to lose consciousness. People also ate *juanzi* berry. These are white-coloured little berries that grow wild in the countryside. *Juanzi* berries are also tasty, but they

Formatted: Left, Indent: First line: 0 cm

Formatted: Right: 0.63 cm

make people sick as well. People lost consciousness after eating them and collapsed all over the place.

[...]

When people couldn't stand the hunger any longer, they also went to the local market to buy black taro to make black bean curd.²⁴ They cooked it up and ate bowl after bowl of that stuff. Afterwards they became sick. In less than half a day, dead bodies were lying around all over the place.

Later, the commune opened an oedema clinic. If somebody became sick, he was sent to the clinic, and given some congee to eat. Chaff was also use to make pills and cakes. That was regarded as good food. Chaff pills, congee, or vegetables were considered good food.²⁵

Comment [RB14]: 'oedema'?

Comment [RB15]: This quotation needs referencing.

Overwhelmed by the number of famine victims across the country, the already exhausted health-care system finally collapsed, contributing to further deaths. Illnesses such as oedema, the massive accumulation of fluid in the body and limbs, caused by starvation and eating poisonous food substitutes, became endemic. In 1961, in Hunan province, Mao's native land, an estimated 46,466 people died of oedema within 46 days in 1961.²⁵ In Sichuan, 450,000 people were reported to be suffering from oedema in 1960 and the first part of 1961. Many people were affected by various forms of mental illness.²⁶ Women developed amenorrhoea and the birth rate dropped

²⁴ The common term for black taro is devil's tongue or the konjac plant. It grows in India, China, Japan, and Korea. In China, Japan, and Korea, the jelly made of the root of konjac or devil's tongue is still widely widely consumed as 'healthier' food. The root is highly toxic if not being treated properly.

²⁵ A report by Hunan Province Bureau of Civil Affairs regarding disease prevention work, 1961. From Hunan Province Bureau of Civil Affairs archive, file 167-1-1016, p. 186.

²⁶ '[Sichuan Province] Bureau of Health and Hygiene's special summery report on treating edema', January 1960-October 1961. From Sichuan Province Bureau of Health and Hygiene archive, file JC 133-219, pp. 15, 37, 48, 106.

Formatted: Left, Indent: First line: 0.63 cm, Line spacing: single

Formatted: Font: 10 pt

Formatted: Font: 10 pt

Formatted: Font: 10 pt

Formatted: Font: 10 pt

Formatted: Right: 0.63 cm

dramatically.²⁷ Entire villages were wiped out, families perished, and the countryside was filled with an eerie silence haunted by hungry ghosts. Several million children became orphans and parents watched as their children vanished overnight.

Mrs B is a peasant woman from western Sichuan. At the time of the famine, she and her daughter both suffered severe oedema but they were denied any medical care:

‘We ate almost everything we managed to find. My body became swollen, and so did my face and eyes. My legs swelled to this big. Because of starvation, my oldest daughter’s body also became swollen. In her case, it was really bad. Her face was so puffed up that she could barely open her eyes. People told me to take her to see a doctor. Where could I go? My older sister was living in Chengdu, she told me to take my daughter to a hospital there. I told her that I had no money.’²⁸

Further south in Luo Guozhen’s village in Hongya county, Sichuan province, starvation, illness, and death were commonplace. The village, situated close to the Sichuan-Tibet border, is very picturesque, surrounded by high mountains blanketed with evergreen trees. The vast, lush forest not only sustains more than 400 species of wildlife, but also provides the surrounding area with rich natural resources. Today the area is also famous for its high-quality dairy products, and a large part of the land has now been converted into organic farms. But back in 1959, hardly anything grew here. Most women were barren, and almost no children were born. Luo is now in late his late 70s. He still remembers 50 years ago on the time of the famine with great pain:

²⁷ ‘Request for additional medical relief funds for the year 1961 to treat edema and gynaecological problems’, June 1961. From Sichuan Province Warfare Committee archive, file JC 202-19, p. 109.

²⁸ An interview with Mrs B in Huang Longxi market town, Sichuan, September 2006.

Formatted: Justified

Formatted: Indent: First line: 1 cm

Formatted: Indent: First line: 0.63 cm, Line spacing: single

Formatted: Right: 0.63 cm

Many people suffered from oedema. It was caused by malnutrition, lack of food, and starvation. Their bodies swelled up, and their skin became very tight, smooth, almost shinning, and transparent. If one pushed a needle into the skin, liquid would burst out. [...] My father was in his fifties then, and he was a strong worker. But because there was no food, he starved to death.

Comment [RB16]: 'oedema'?

[...]

At the time, there was only one traditional medicine doctor working at a clinic at the nearby market town. When people went to see him, he would tell them:

Formatted: Indent: First line: 0 cm

“If you can find some squash or pumpkin, cook them up together with some maize flour. Get that down you and you might be able to live.” That’s all.

Otherwise there was nothing. [In those days] people were at the mercy of the cadres. A cadre’s words were worth gold. It was considered amazing luck if they happened to let you have some food. Otherwise you might end up with nothing.

There were seven big production brigades in our area. During that year, not one woman gave birth to a child. Why? Because people had nothing to eat. Most people were so poor and hungry, and their health was in a terrible state. No wonder women could not bear children. Many women suffered from amenorrhoea, and infertility was widespread. Infertility was linked to amenorrhoea. It was caused by malnutrition. Men also had a very low sperm count. [...] Villagers looked sallow and emaciated. They could barely walk steadily, and most of them were having a hard time keeping themselves alive. How could they bear children? [...]

Formatted: Indent: First line: 0 cm

Formatted: Right: 0.63 cm

So many people starved to death at the time – it’s horrifying. It was so painful.

Even now, when I think of that time, I still feel a great pain.²⁹

To ease the crisis, local cadres encouraged villagers and medical personnel to develop rudimentary healing techniques. For example, the local cadre Zhang Sizhou from Jianyang county in Sichuan discovered by accident that a chicken was cured from a serious infectious disease through hot steam treatment. Inferring that he could treat villagers suffering from oedema as result of malnutrition, he ordered communal hot steam baths, only to find out that while it did not cure inflammation, it did bring on menstruation for those suffering from amenorrhoea. The news excited Li Jingquan, the provincial party boss. He sent a team of doctors and medical students to Jianyang to evaluate Zhang’s steam treatment, hoping to promote it to the rest of the province.

Zhou Zhaoxi was a fourth-year medical student at Sichuan medical university at the time, and a member of the medical team. He remembers the trip to Jianyang:

“On the second day, we visited the steam treatment clinic in the commune. The clinic was set up in a local village. It was a straw hut consisting of a few rooms. There was a waiting room, which was a slightly bigger room, with a few benches inside. The room was crowded with villagers waiting to be treated. They were all adult, including both men and women. The room where the treatment took place was very small, only a few square meters in size. There was a hole in the ground used as the stove. A huge iron wok sat on the stove, full of herbal medicines. On top of the wok was a big wooden steamer. When

²⁹ [An interview with Luo Guozhen, Hongya County, Sichuan, April 2007](#)

Formatted: Indent: Left: 0 cm

Formatted: Indent: First line: 0 cm

Comment [RB17]: This quotation needs referencing.

Formatted: Indent: First line: 1 cm

Comment [RB18]: ‘consisting’?

Formatted: Right: 0.63 cm

we entered the steam room, it was filled with steam and the pungent smell of herbal medicine. The patient climbed on to the steamer and sat in there for a few minutes, until his entire body became sweaty. Once he came out of the steam room, he was given a bowl of water sweetened with molasses to drink. After resting for a few minutes, the patient left. After a few treatments, symptoms of oedema disappeared. [...] but after a few days, those symptoms reappeared.

Comment [RB19]: 'oedema'?

Comment [ZX20]: Yes 'oedema'

Our professor who was in charge of the team warned us not to treat any villagers with western medicine, for it could be considered a serious political error. Not long after, more doctors and students from our university were sent to this commune. The intention was to establish a branch school here to help set up steam treatment centre in every village. [...] By the time we left, steam treatment centres were not only all over this commune, but also throughout Jianyang and the rest of Sichuan. Steam treatment became a panacea for any kind illnesses. Even Sichuan medical university hospital built a beautiful steam centre. Films on the treatment were also being made [...] and in Shanghai a steam treatment showroom was built for visitors from all over the country. [...]

Formatted: Indent: First line: 0 cm

Comment [RB21]: 'set up a steam ... '?

Comment [ZX22]: YES

But steam treatment could not stop the spread of oedema, and the number of deaths continued to increase. Some medical experts questioned the effectiveness of this treatment, [...] and gradually it disappeared into nothing.³⁰

Comment [RB23]: 'oedema'?

Comment [ZX24]: oedema

Formatted: Indent: First line: 0 cm

In parts of the country, such as Hunan in central China, villagers turned to religious healers, who were officially banned under the Communist government.

Formatted: Indent: First line: 1 cm

Formatted: Indent: First line: 0.63 cm, Line spacing: single

Formatted: Right: 0.63 cm

³⁰ Interview with Zhou Zhaoxi in Chengdu, Sichuan province, 10 September 10, 2007.

Shaodong county in central Hunan had 56 townships at the time, and villagers from 32 townships were found regularly attending religious ceremonies. Sometimes, about several hundred people attended these ceremonies, but on average at least 50 villagers turned up on a regular basis. In Laiyang county's Yunqing township, every village had a shrine, each family set up an altar, and the incense was always burning. In Laiyang, doctors' fees were too high for the villagers, so people turned to Buddhist monks and Daoist priests for healing.³¹ In Changde county's Laihuaping township, some 200 people turned up at a local religious healing ceremony one night. The local cadre tried to stop the ceremony and smashed statues of local gods. Villagers got angry and demanded the statues of the gods being re-installed. In Niutouhu county town's Ma'anshan village, several hundred villagers, including many young people and party members, turned up at a local healing ceremony every 1st and 15th fifteenth day of the month [of the lunar calendar].³²

Conclusion:

As Moshe Lewin (Lewin, 1985) has argued in the case of the Soviet Union, the home-centred rural culture and the neither world of magic and sorcery, of demons and 'outcast souls' inhabited by the denizens of the countryside, were essential strategies that enabled the Soviet peasantry to survive the collectivisation in the Stalinist era.³³ The same can be said for China. A few examples in this paper show that popular beliefs and traditional practices were essential for survival in times of forced collectivisation, political indoctrination, and resource-stripping in Mao's

³¹ Regarding rural affairs, by Hunan Provincial Party Committee, 1957. From Hunan Provincial Party Committee archive, file 141-1-835, pp. 27-8.

³² Regarding rural affairs, by Hunan Provincial Party Committee, 1957. From Hunan Provincial Party Committee archive, file 141-1-835, p. 44.

³³ Lewin 1985.

Formatted: Indent: First line: 1.27 cm

Formatted: Font: 10 pt

Formatted: Font: 10 pt

Formatted: English (U.K.)

Formatted: Right: 0.63 cm

China. The Communist government's concerted effort to eliminate religion as well as popular beliefs and practices could not remove their importance as essential strategies for survival. In a time of traumatic social, political, and economic changes, popular beliefs and practices provided ordinary peasants with a sense of agency and hope, as well as a source for healing.

As the Great Leap ~~F~~famine worsened, and the government failed to deliver any adequate famine relief and health-care, villagers stole and cheated to stay live. Some even sold their children in exchange for a bowl of rice. Many turned more and more to religious and traditional healers, and developed or 'rediscovered' a variety of strategies for coping with hunger — from eating earth and worms to decomposing animals and human flesh. Out of desperation, the danger of food poisoning seemed not to be part of people's awareness or avoidance patterns, such as eating rotten flesh, which after being malnourished might have finally caused death.

While most survivors consider themselves lucky to have survived the famine, they often find the experience of survival extremely painful. More than 50 years after the famine, many survivors still struggle to try to cope with the swift changes in this new era of economic boom as well as the painful past of surviving the worst famine in human history. Religion and popular beliefs as well as basic household kitchen knowledge continued to provide solace and are often the only hope and consolation for many survivors. Their shared remedies and recipes, which they used to sustain hunger and to survive famine, provide a non-threatening context to elicit and explore what are often painful memories. By matching the old recipes for famine survival to new modern applications we get a better understanding of continuity and change in the history Chinese emergency nutrition. Furthermore, these personalised kitchen knowledge themselves are technical evidence of how ordinary people devised

complex and plural strategies to cope with the fundamental biological crises that had been brought on by the worst and state-manufactured Great Famine of the twentieth century. By matching the old recipes against new in modern application we get a better understanding of continuity and change in Chinese emergency nutrition.

Comment [MH25]: I moved your final sentence up one because this sentence works better for a conclusion – please revise the final wording if you want or accept – just thought you should bring the author back full circle to your focus on this being the worst famine of the 20th c and how ordinary Chinese managed to survive it.

Comment [ZX26]: That's great. Thank you.

Formatted: Indent: First line: 0 cm

Selected Bibliography References

Ashton, Basil B., Kenneth K. Hill, Alan A. Piazza and Robin R. Zeitz 1984, 'Famine in China, 1958–61',

Population and Development Review, 10, no. 4: – (Dec. 1984), pp. 613–45.

Bachman, David D. 1991, *Bureaucracy, Economy, and Leadership in China: The Institutional Origins of the Great Leap Forward*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Banister J. 1987, *China's Changing Population*, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: 12 pt

Formatted: Font: 12 pt, Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: 12 pt

Formatted: Right: 0.63 cm

Becker, Jasper J. 1996, *Hungry Ghosts: Mao's Secret Famine*, New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1996.

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: No underline

Formatted: No underline

Bernstein, Thomas T. P. 1984, 'Stalinism, Famine and Chinese Peasants: Grain Procurements during the Great Leap Forward', *Theory and Society*, 13 (May 1984), pp. 339-77.

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Bernstein, Thomas T. P. 1990, review of Penny P. Kane, 'Famine in China 1959-1961', in *China Quarterly*, no. 121 (March 1990), p. 133.

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Bozzoli, Belinda B. 1991, *Women of Phokeng: Consciousness, Life Strategy and Migrancy in South Africa, 1900-83*, 1991

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Brooks, Jeffrey J. 2000, *Thank you, Comrade Stalin! Soviet Public Culture from Revolution to Cold War*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000.

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic

Cao Shuji 曹樹基 2005, *Da jihuang: 1959-1961 nian de Zhongguo renkou 大飢荒 1959-1961 年的中國人口* (The Great Famine: China's Population in 1959-1961), Hong Kong: Shidai guoji chubanshe youxian gongsi, 2005.

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

Chan, Alfred A. L. 2001, *Mao's Crusade: Politics and Policy Implementation in China's Great Leap Forward*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001.

Formatted: Font: (Default) 新細明體, (Asian) Chinese (Taiwan)

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Right: 0.63 cm

Chang, G. H. and G. J. Wen 1997, 'Communal Deining and the Chinese Ffamine of 1958-1961', *Economic Development and Cultural Change*, no. 46, (1997), pp. 1-34.

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Chan, A., R. Madsen and J. Unger (eds.) 1992. *Chen Village under Mao and Deng*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Chao Kang 1970, *Agricultural P*roduction in *C*ommunist China, 1949-1965, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970.

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

Chan, Anita, Richard Madsen and Jonathan Unger (eds), *Chen Village under Mao and Deng*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992.

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Chen Yixin 2010, 'When Food Became Scarce: Life and Death in Chinese Villages during the Great Leap Forward', *Journal of the Historical Society*, No. 2 (2010): 117-165.

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Davis, Mike M. 2002, *Late Victorian Holocausts: El Niño Famines and the Making of the Third World*, London, Verso, 2002

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

De Waal, Alex A. 1998, *Famine Crimes: Politics & the Disaster Relief Industry in Africa, Indiana*: Indiana University Press, 1998.

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

De Waal, A. 2004, *Famine that Kills: Darfur, Sudan, 1984-5*, Oxford: Oxford University Press 2004.

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Right: 0.63 cm

Dikötter, Frank F. 2010, *Mao's Great Famine: The History of China's Most Devastating*

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline
Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Catastrophe, 1958-62, London: Bloomsbury, 2010.

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline
Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline
Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Ding Shu 丁抒 1996, *Renhuo: Da yuejin yu da jihuang* 人祸：“大跃进”与大饥荒

Formatted: Highlight
Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline
Formatted: Font: Italic

(A *Man-made Catastrophe: The Great Leap Forward and the Great Famine*),
Hong Kong: Jiushi niandai zazhi, 1996.

Formatted: Font: Italic
Formatted: Font: Italic
Formatted: Font: Italic

Domenach, Jean J.-L. 1995, *The Origins of the Great Leap Forward: The Cease of One*

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline
Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Chinese Province, Boulder: Westview Press, 1995.

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline
Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Fitzpatrick, Sheila S. 1999, *Everyday Stalinism: Ordinary Life in Extraordinary Times*,
Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline
Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline
Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline
Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline
Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Gao, Mobe M. C. F. 1999, *Gao Village: A Portrait of Rural Life in Modern China*, London:
Hurst, 1999.

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Gao Wangling 高王凌 2006, *Renmin gongshe shiqi Zhongguo nongmin 'fanxingwei' diaocha*

Formatted: Highlight
Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

人民公社时期中国农民‘反行为’调查 (Acts of Peasant Resistance in China during the People's Communes), Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2006.

Formatted: Font: Italic
Formatted: Font: Italic
Formatted: Font: Italic
Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Right: 0.63 cm

Gong Qisheng 龚启圣-1998, 'Jinnianlai zhi 1958—61 nian Zhongguo da jihuang

Formatted: Highlight

qiying yanjiu

de zongshu' 近年来之 1958—61 年中国大饥荒起因研究的综述 (A

Summary of Research on the Causes of the Great Famine in China in

1958—

61), *Ershiyi shiji*, no. 48: (Aug. 1998), pp. 14—21.

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Jing Jun 1996, *The Temple of Memories: History, Power, and Morality in a Chinese*

Formatted: Font: 12 pt

Village, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Formatted: Font: 12 pt, Italic

Formatted: Font: 12 pt, Italic

Formatted: Font: 12 pt, Italic

Formatted: Font: 12 pt

Kane, Penny P. 1988, *Famine in China, 1959—61: Demographic and Social*

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Implications,

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988.

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Kimberley E. and F. Wemheuer (eds.) 2011, Felix Ed., *Eating Bitterness: New*

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Perspectives on

China's Great Leap Forward and the Famine, Vancouver: University Press

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

of

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

British Columbia, 2011.

Kotkin, Stephen S. 1997, *Magnetic Mountain: Stalinism as a Civilization*, Berkeley,

Formatted: Font: Italic

CA:

University of California Press, 1997.

Lewin, Moshe M. 1985, *The Making of the Soviet System: Essays in the Social*

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

History of

Interwar Russia, London: Methuen, 1985.

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Right: 0.63 cm

Liao Bokang 廖伯康 2005, 'Lishi changhe li de yige xuanwo: Sichuan Xiao, Li, Liao

Formatted: Font: 12 pt, Highlight

shijian

Formatted: Font: 12 pt

huimou'-历史长河里的一个漩涡：四川‘萧李廖事件’回眸 ('A

Formatted: Font: 12 pt

Whirlpool

Formatted: Font: 12 pt

Formatted: Font: 12 pt

in History: Recounting the "Xiao, Li, Liao Incident" in Sichuan), in *Dangdai*

Formatted: Font: 12 pt

Sichuan Yaoshi shilu (*Major Historical Events in Sichuan during the Maoist*

Formatted: Font: 12 pt

Era), by the Contemporary Oral History Editorial Office, Chengdu: Sichuan Renmin

Formatted: Font: 12 pt, Italic

chubanshe.

Formatted: Font: 12 pt, Italic

Formatted: Font: 12 pt

Formatted: Font: 12 pt, Italic

Formatted: Font: 12 pt

Li Huaiyin 2005, 'Everyday Strategies for Team Farming in Collective-era China:

Evidence from Qin Village', *The China Journal*, No. 54 (July 2005), pp. 79-

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

98

Anon. CHECK Linxia zhouzhi biancuanweiyuanhui 临夏州志编纂委员会 Linxia

Formatted: Highlight

Huizu Zizhizhou Zhi 临夏回族自治州志 1993, (*The Local History of Linxia Hui*

Formatted: No underline

Autonomous Region). Gansu renminchubanshe, 1993

Formatted: No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: (Asian) Chinese (PRC), (Other) English (U.K.)

Li Ruojian 李若建 1998, 'Da yuejin hou de renkou sunshi ruogan wenti' 大跃进后人

Formatted: Highlight

口损失

的若干问题-('Some Questions about Population Loss after the Great Leap

Forward'), *Zhongguo renkou kexue*, no. 4 (1998), pp. 40-44

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Li Ruojian . 2002, 'Da yuejin yu kunnan shiqi fei zhengchang siwang yuanyin

fenxi'

大躍進與困難時期非正常死亡原因分析-('Analysis of the Causes of

Formatted: Right: 0.63 cm

Unnatural Deaths during the Great Leap Forward'), *Ershiyi shiji*, no. 72: (Aug. 2002), pp. 59–70.

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Lin, Justin J. Yifu Y. and Dennis D. Tao Yang 2000, 'Food Availability, Entitlements and the Chinese

Famine of 1959-61', *Economic Journal*, no. 110: (Jan. 2000), pp. 136–58.

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Liu Suinian 柳随年 and Wu Qungan 吴群敢 1984, *Da yuejin he tiaozheng shiqi de guomin jingji*

Formatted: Highlight

Formatted: Highlight

Formatted: Font: Italic

(1958–1965). *大跃进和调整时期的国民经济*, Harbin: Heilongjiang renmin chubanshe, 1984.

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

MacFarquhar, Roderick R. 1983, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution*, vol. 2, *The Great*

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

Leap Forward, 1958–1960, New York: Columbia University Press, 1983.

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

Ma Maocai 1984 馬懋才 1628, *Beichen dajishu* (備陳大饑疏 1628) (A Narration of the Great

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

Famine in Shaanxi) in the *Mingji beilue* 《明季北略》卷五, Repr. Beijing, Zhonghua Shuju, 1984.

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

Manning, Kimberley K. E. 2005, 'Marxist Maternalism, Memory, and the Mobilization of

Women during the Great Leap Forward', *The China Review*, 5, 1: no. 1 (Spring 2005), pp. 83–110.

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Right: 0.63 cm

Mao Lei 毛磊 1993, *Wu Chuanhuang and Liu Lukai, Zhongguo de pingjun zhuyi- 中国的平均主义 (China's Equalitarianism)*, Zhengzhou: Henan renmin chubanshe, 1993.

Formatted: Highlight

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

Myers, Ramon R. H 1978., 'Wheat in China: Past, Present and Future', *China Quarterly*, 74: no. 74 (June 1978), pp. 297-333.

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Odoric of Pordenone and Paolo Chiesa 2002, *The Travels of Friar Odoric: A Fourteenth-Century Journal of the Blessed Odoric of Pordenone*, Grand Rapids and Cambridge: William B Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Formatted: Font: 12 pt

Formatted: Font: 12 pt, Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: 12 pt, Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: 12 pt

Formatted: Font: 12 pt, Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: 12 pt

Formatted: Font: 12 pt

Peng Xizhe 1987, 'Demographic Consequences of the Great Leap Forward in China's Provinces', *Population and Development Review*, 13, 4: no. 4. (Dec. 1987), pp. 639-670.

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Qu Qingbiao 1996, *Chaoyue wutuobang: Mao Zedong de shehuizhuyi guan 超越乌托邦--毛泽东的社会主义观*, Beijing: Beijing chubanshe, 1996.

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

Formatted: Font: Not Italic

Schoenhals, Michael M. 1987, *Saltonist Socialism: Mao Zedong and the Great Leap Forward 1958*, Stockholm: Institutionen for Orientaliska Sprak, University of Stockholm, 1987.

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Right: 0.63 cm

Sen, [Amartya A. 1982](#), *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlements and Deprivation*,

Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Song Liansheng [宋连生 2002](#), *Zongluxian, da yuejin, renmin gongshehua yundong shimo*,

总路线、大跃进、人民公社化运动始末. Kunming: Yunnan renmin chubanshe, 2002.

Formatted: Font: Italic

Teiwes, [Frederick F. C. and Warren W. Sun 1999](#), *China's Road to Disaster: Mao, Central Politicians,*

and Provincial Leaders in the Unfolding of the Great Leap Forward 1955-

=

1959, Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1999.

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic

Thaxton, [Ralph R. 2008](#), *Mao's Great Leap Forward Famine and the Origins of Righteous Resistance in Da Fo Village*, Cambridge: Cambridge University

Press, 2008

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Indent: Left: 1.27 cm

Tonkin, [Elizabeth E. 1992](#), *Narrating our Past: The Social Construction of Oral History*,

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992.

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Vansina, [Jan J. 1965](#), *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology*,

London:

Routledge & Paul, 1965.

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Wemheuer, [Felix F. 2010](#). 'Dealing with Responsibility for the Great Leap Famine in

Formatted: Right: 0.63 cm

the People's Republic of China', *The China Quarterly*, No. 201 (2010): 176-195.

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Will, Pierre-P. Etienne E. 1990, *Bureaucracy and Famine: Eighteenth-Century China and Nourish*

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: No underline

the People, trans. by Elborg E. Forster, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990.

Formatted: No underline

Formatted: No underline

Xie Chuntao 谢春涛 1990, *Da yuejin kuanglan 大跃进狂澜 (The Mad Wave of the Great Leap Forward)*,

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

Zhengzhou: Henan renmin chubanshe, 1990.

Yang Dali L. 1996, *Calamity and Reform in China: State, Rural Society, and*

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Institutional Change since the Great Leap Famine, Stanford: Stanford

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

University Press, 1996.

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Zeng Qingrong 曾庆荣 2001, *Da haojie: Da yuejin yu da jihuang 大浩劫：大跃进*

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

与大饥荒, Urumqi: Xinjiang renmin chubanshe, 2001.

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Zhang Lelian L. 张乐天 2005, *Gaobie lixiang: Renmin gongshe zhidu yanjiu 告别公*

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

社：人民公社制度研究 (Farewell to Idealism: Studies on the People's Communes),

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

Shanghai: Shanghai renmin chubanshe,

Formatted: Font: Italic

Zhang Zhou 张鷟-1997, *Caoye Jianzai (朝野僉载)*, vol. 2, Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju.

2005.

Zhang Zhanbin 张湛彬, Liu Jiehui and Zhang Guohua 2001, *Liu Jiehui and Zhang*

Formatted: No underline

Guohua, Da yuejin he sannian kunnan shiqi de Zhongguo 大跃进和三年困难时期的

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Right: 0.63 cm

中国 (*China during the Great Leap Forward and the Three Difficult Years*),

Beijing: Zhongguo shangye chubanshe, 2001.

Zhonggong Fujian shengwei dangshi yanjiushi (eds.) 2001, *Da yuejin yundong:*

Fujian juan 大跃进运动: 福建卷 (*The Great Leap Forward: Fujian Province*),

Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 2001.

Zhou Xun 2012, *The Great Famine in China: A Documentary History, 1958-1962*,

New Haven and London Yale: Yale University Press, 2012.

Zhou Xun 2013, *Forgotten Voices of Mao's Great Famine, 1958-1962: An Oral*

History, New Haven and London: Yale University Press

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: Italic, No underline

Formatted: Font: Times New Roman

Formatted: Font: Times New Roman

Formatted: Font: Times New Roman, Italic

Formatted: Font: Italic

Formatted: English (U.K.)

Formatted: Right: 0.63 cm